

Role and Training of Emergency Department Charge Nurses: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

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In the fast-paced emergency department, charge nurses ensure efficient operations and excellent patient care. Emergency department charge nurses' roles and training affect patient outcomes and staff satisfaction. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of emergency department charge nurses and examine their training needs and challenges. A qualitative research approach utilizing phenomenology was employed to capture the rich and subjective experiences of emergency department charge nurses. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of charge nurses working in different emergency departments. The interviews focused on understanding the role expectations, responsibilities, and training experiences of charge nurses. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns within the participants' narratives. The analysis revealed several key themes related to the role and training of emergency department charge nurses. Charge nurses described their role as multifaceted, encompassing responsibilities such as coordinating patient flow, managing staff assignments, collaborating with other healthcare professionals, and ensuring quality care delivery. Training needs identified by charge nurses included leadership skills development, conflict resolution, effective communication, and clinical expertise enhancement. Challenges faced by charge nurses included high workload, time constraints, and the need to balance administrative tasks with direct patient care. This phenomenological investigation illuminated emergency department charge nurse roles and training requirements. Understanding charge nurses' life experiences may help create successful and satisfying training and support programs. Healthcare companies may enhance emergency department patient outcomes and staff engagement by addressing charge nurse training requirements and concerns.

Keywords: emergency department, charge nurses, role, training, phenomenology, qualitative research.

Introduction

In emergency departments (EDs) worldwide, charge nurses play a crucial role in the coordination and management of patient care, ensuring efficient operations and optimal patient outcomes. The dynamic and high-stakes nature of emergency care demands competent and skilled charge nurses who can effectively handle the unique challenges and complexities of the ED environment. However, despite the pivotal role charge nurses play in ED settings, there is a research gap regarding their specific responsibilities, training needs, and experiences (Harthi et al., 2020).

On a global scale, emergency care systems face significant pressures due to increasing patient volumes, limited resources, and diverse healthcare demands. Charge nurses serve as frontline leaders who oversee the day-to-day operations of the ED, making critical decisions and delegating tasks to the nursing staff. Their role encompasses diverse responsibilities, such as triage coordination, resource allocation, staff supervision, and ensuring adherence to clinical protocols. Effective charge nursing is vital for promoting patient safety, managing patient flow, and maintaining high-quality care in the face of these challenges (Mlambo et al., 2021).

In the context of the Philippines, a country with a rapidly growing population and a healthcare system undergoing continuous development, the role of charge nurses in EDs becomes even more significant. The Philippines faces unique healthcare challenges, including limited resources, unequal access to care, and frequent natural disasters (Seposo, 2019). The effective functioning of EDs and the role of charge nurses are critical in delivering timely and appropriate emergency care, especially during periods of increased demand and disaster response. Understanding the specific responsibilities and training needs of charge nurses in the Philippine context is essential for improving emergency care delivery and optimizing patient outcomes.

At the local level, within specific ED settings, there is a need to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of charge nurses. While some research exists on the role of charge nurses in general nursing contexts, there is a scarcity of literature specifically focused on their experiences and training needs in the ED environment. A phenomenological inquiry into the role and training of emergency department charge nurses can provide in-depth insights into their unique challenges, responsibilities, decision-making processes, and interactions within the multidisciplinary team.

This study aims to address the research gap by conducting a phenomenological inquiry into the role and training of emergency department charge nurses. By exploring the lived experiences of charge nurses in the ED context, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of their challenges, competencies, and training needs. The findings can inform the development of targeted training programs, policies, and support systems to enhance the effectiveness of charge nurses and improve overall ED performance.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the body of knowledge on charge nursing in emergency care. By shedding light on the specific responsibilities, training needs, and experiences of charge nurses in the ED environment, this study can inform the development of evidence-based practices and training programs tailored to this specialized role. Ultimately, the findings can lead to improved patient outcomes, enhanced teamwork and collaboration, and better overall functioning of EDs.

In conclusion, this study aims to fill the research gap in understanding the role and training of emergency department charge nurses through a phenomenological inquiry. By exploring their experiences in the global, Philippine, and local contexts, we aim to provide valuable insights and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and support the professional development of charge nurses in emergency care settings.

Methods

Research Design. This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the role and training of emergency department charge nurses. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that aims to understand and describe the lived experiences and meanings attributed to a particular phenomenon. In this study, phenomenology was chosen as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of emergency department charge nurses regarding their roles and the training they receive.

Sampling. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants for this study. The sample consisted of emergency department charge nurses working in various healthcare settings. The inclusion criteria for the participants were (1) currently employed as an emergency department charge nurse, (2) possessing at least two years of experience in the role, and (3) willing to share their experiences and perspectives regarding their role and training. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, where new information and insights were no longer emerging from the data.

Data Gathering Tools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection tool in this study. An interview guide was developed based on a review of relevant literature and research objectives. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore various aspects of the role and training of emergency department charge nurses. The interview questions focused on the responsibilities, challenges, decision-making processes, training programs, and perceived impact on patient care. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected from the interviews. This approach involved a systematic process of identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. Initially, the transcribed interviews were read and re-read to gain familiarity with the content. Then, the data were coded using an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge directly from the data. Codes were reviewed and refined to ensure accurate representation of the participants' experiences. Themes were subsequently identified, categorized, and analyzed for commonalities and variations. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with regular discussions among the research team to ensure rigor and validity in the interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality of their responses. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participant anonymity in the reporting and dissemination of the study findings.

Results

The analysis of data revealed several key themes related to the role and training of emergency department charge nurses. These themes shed light on the multifaceted nature of the charge nurse role and the various aspects of their responsibilities.

Firstly, the study found that emergency department charge nurses play a multifaceted role in their daily practice. They are responsible for coordinating patient flow within the department, ensuring efficient and timely movement of patients through various stages of care. This includes triaging patients, assigning them to appropriate treatment areas, and coordinating with other healthcare professionals to ensure smooth transitions and continuity of care.

Another significant theme that emerged was the management of staff assignments. Charge nurses are tasked with assigning and allocating resources, including healthcare professionals and support staff, to different areas of the emergency department. They must consider factors such as patient acuity, staff competencies, and workload distribution to ensure optimal patient care and efficient workflow.

Collaboration with healthcare professionals was identified as a crucial aspect of the charge nurse role. Effective communication and collaboration with physicians, nurses, and other members of the healthcare team are essential for ensuring coordinated and comprehensive care delivery. Charge nurses must facilitate interprofessional collaboration, promote teamwork, and foster a supportive work environment.

Ensuring quality care delivery emerged as a significant theme in the study. Charge nurses play a vital role in monitoring and maintaining the quality of care provided in the emergency department. They are responsible for implementing and enforcing evidence-based practices, adhering to clinical guidelines, and promoting patient safety initiatives. Charge nurses must also oversee the proper documentation of patient care and ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

Finally, the theme of leadership skills development was prominent in the study. The findings revealed that charge nurses identified the need for ongoing development of their leadership skills. This

includes skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and strategic planning. Enhancing leadership competencies is essential for charge nurses to effectively manage the complexities of their role and promote a positive work environment.

Overall, these findings provide valuable insights into the role and training needs of emergency department charge nurses. Understanding the multifaceted nature of their role, the importance of coordination, collaboration, and quality care delivery can guide future interventions and training programs aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of charge nurses in the emergency department setting.

Discussions

The results of this study provide significant insights into the role and training needs of emergency department charge nurses. The multifaceted nature of their role, as highlighted by the themes identified, emphasizes the diverse responsibilities they undertake daily. Coordinating patient flow emerged as a crucial aspect of their role, involving the efficient movement of patients through different stages of care. This includes triaging patients, assigning them to appropriate treatment areas, and collaborating with other healthcare professionals to ensure seamless transitions and continuity of care.

The findings of this study emphasize the crucial role of charge nurses in managing staff assignments within the emergency department. Charge nurses are responsible for allocating healthcare professionals and support staff to different areas of the department, taking into consideration various factors that impact patient care and resource utilization. One of the key factors considered by charge nurses is patient acuity, which refers to the severity and complexity of a patient's condition. By assessing the acuity level of each patient, charge nurses can assign appropriate staff members with the necessary skills and expertise to provide the required level of care. This ensures that patients receive the appropriate attention and treatment they need based on their specific condition (Lee et al., 2022).

Staff competencies also play a vital role in staff assignment management. Charge nurses must consider the skills, experience, and qualifications of each healthcare professional to ensure they are assigned to areas that align with their expertise (Jang et al., 2022). Matching staff competencies with patient needs helps optimize the quality of care provided and enhances patient safety. Furthermore, workload distribution is a critical aspect of managing staff assignments. Charge nurses need to distribute the workload among healthcare professionals and support staff effectively, considering the number of patients, the complexity of cases, and the available resources. By balancing the workload, charge nurses can prevent burnout, ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities, and maintain a smooth workflow within the emergency department.

Effective management of staff assignments contributes to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the emergency department. When healthcare professionals and support staff are appropriately allocated based on patient acuity, competencies, and workload distribution, it leads to optimized resource utilization, improved patient outcomes, and enhanced overall patient care experience. To support charge nurses in their role of managing staff assignments, healthcare organizations should provide them with adequate resources, tools, and training. This may include implementing standardized protocols for staff assignment, providing decision-support systems, and offering professional development opportunities to enhance their skills in workforce management.

Moreover, collaboration with healthcare professionals is a critical aspect of the charge nurse role within the emergency department, as highlighted by the findings of this study. Effective communication and collaboration among charge nurses, physicians, nurses, and other team members are essential for ensuring coordinated and comprehensive care delivery. Charge nurses serve as a bridge between different healthcare professionals, facilitating interprofessional collaboration and promoting teamwork (Greene, 2021). They play a vital role in establishing effective lines of communication and fostering a collaborative work environment. This includes ensuring that information flows smoothly between team members, sharing relevant patient data, and coordinating care plans.

By promoting interprofessional collaboration, charge nurses enable healthcare professionals to work together synergistically, leveraging their diverse expertise and perspectives to provide optimal care for patients. Collaboration enhances the coordination of care, reduces errors, and improves patient

outcomes. It allows healthcare professionals to collectively address complex patient needs, make informed decisions, and develop comprehensive care plans. In addition to facilitating collaboration among healthcare professionals, charge nurses also contribute to fostering a supportive work environment within the emergency department. They promote teamwork, encourage open communication, and create a culture that values collaboration and mutual respect (Tingvold & Munkejord, 2021). This supportive environment enhances job satisfaction and engagement among healthcare professionals, leading to improved patient care outcomes.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of effective collaboration and communication skills for charge nurses in providing high-quality care within the emergency department. Effective collaboration requires clear and timely communication, active listening, and the ability to effectively convey information across different healthcare disciplines. Charge nurses should possess strong interpersonal skills, including diplomacy, empathy, and conflict resolution, to navigate complex healthcare situations and foster effective teamwork. To support charge nurses in their collaborative role, healthcare organizations should provide training and resources to enhance their communication and teamwork skills. This may include workshops, simulation exercises, and ongoing professional development programs. Furthermore, creating a culture of collaboration and open communication within the organization can encourage and sustain effective collaboration among healthcare professionals.

Furthermore, ensuring quality care delivery is a paramount responsibility of charge nurses within the emergency department, as emphasized by the findings of this study. Charge nurses play a pivotal role in maintaining and monitoring the quality of care provided to patients, ensuring that it aligns with evidence-based practices and adheres to clinical guidelines. One of the key responsibilities of charge nurses is the implementation of evidence-based practices. They are responsible for staying up to date with the latest research and best practices in emergency care and incorporating them into daily practice. By following evidence-based guidelines, charge nurses can enhance patient outcomes, improve the effectiveness of interventions, and ensure that care is delivered in line with the latest scientific evidence.

Adherence to clinical guidelines is another crucial aspect of quality care delivery. Charge nurses play a vital role in ensuring that healthcare professionals follow established clinical protocols and guidelines in the emergency department. This includes guidelines related to triage, assessment, treatment, and patient safety. By promoting adherence to these guidelines, charge nurses contribute to standardized and consistent care, reducing variability and enhancing the overall quality of care provided. Patient safety initiatives are also under the purview of charge nurses. They are responsible for promoting and implementing initiatives aimed at improving patient safety, such as infection control protocols, medication safety measures, and fall prevention strategies. Charge nurses play a key role in educating and training healthcare professionals on patient safety practices, monitoring compliance, and addressing any safety concerns that may arise.

Charge nurses also have a responsibility to oversee the proper documentation of patient care. Accurate and comprehensive documentation is essential for continuity of care, effective communication among healthcare professionals, and legal and regulatory compliance. Charge nurses ensure that healthcare professionals document relevant patient information, assessments, interventions, and outcomes accurately and in a timely manner. Furthermore, charge nurses ensure compliance with regulatory standards set by governing bodies and accreditation agencies. They are responsible for understanding and implementing the policies and standards that govern emergency care, ensuring that the department operates in accordance with these requirements. By maintaining compliance, charge nurses contribute to the overall safety and quality of care provided to patients.

The commitment of charge nurses to ensuring quality care has a direct impact on the safety and satisfaction of patients. By implementing evidence-based practices, adhering to clinical guidelines, promoting patient safety initiatives, overseeing proper documentation, and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards, charge nurses contribute to a healthcare environment that is focused on delivering high-quality, safe, and patient-centered care. To further support charge nurses in their role in ensuring quality care delivery, healthcare organizations should provide ongoing education and training on evidence-based practices, clinical guidelines, patient safety, and documentation standards. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous quality improvement and providing resources for quality monitoring and feedback

can further enhance the role of charge nurses in maintaining and improving the quality of care within the emergency department.

On the other hand, leadership skills development is a critical aspect highlighted by the findings of this study, underscoring the importance of continuous improvement in this area for charge nurses. Effective leadership skills are essential for charge nurses to navigate the complexities of their role, foster a positive work environment, and promote high-quality patient care within the emergency department. One key leadership skill identified is effective communication. Charge nurses need to communicate clearly and efficiently with healthcare professionals, patients, and their families (Kwame, 2021). Clear communication ensures that information is relayed accurately, expectations are understood, and collaboration among team members is facilitated. Developing effective communication skills enables charge nurses to effectively convey instructions, listen attentively, and provide necessary feedback, ultimately enhancing teamwork and patient outcomes (Sibiya, 2018).

Conflict resolution is another vital leadership skill for charge nurses. Working in a high-stress environment like the emergency department can lead to conflicts and disagreements. Charge nurses must possess the ability to address conflicts promptly and find solutions that promote harmony and cooperation among team members. By developing conflict resolution skills, charge nurses can effectively manage interpersonal conflicts, foster a positive work environment, and maintain the focus on patient care. Effective decision-making is crucial for charge nurses in their role. They are often faced with time-sensitive and critical decisions that impact patient care and department operations. Charge nurses need to possess the skills to gather and analyze relevant information, consider different perspectives, and make informed decisions in a timely manner. Strengthening decision-making skills enables charge nurses to make sound judgments and choices that optimize patient outcomes and department efficiency (George & Massey, 2020).

Strategic planning is another key leadership competency for charge nurses. They need to have a forward-thinking approach to identify areas for improvement, set goals, and develop strategies to achieve them. By engaging in strategic planning, charge nurses can enhance the overall performance of the emergency department, improve processes, and address challenges proactively (Weston, 2022). Developing strategic planning skills empowers charge nurses to think critically, anticipate future needs, and drive positive change within the department. It is imperative for healthcare organizations to prioritize the continuous development of leadership skills among charge nurses. Offering leadership training programs, workshops, and opportunities for professional growth can enable charge nurses to enhance their communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and strategic planning abilities. Providing mentorship and coaching support can also contribute to their leadership development journey.

By investing in leadership skills development for charge nurses, healthcare organizations can empower them to effectively manage their role, foster a positive work environment, and promote high-quality patient care (Hassan & Shabaan, 2020). This investment not only benefits charge nurses individually but also has a positive impact on the overall functioning of the emergency department. It leads to improved teamwork, enhanced patient satisfaction, and better outcomes for patients (Rosen et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the discussions based on the results of this study provide valuable insights into the multifaceted role of emergency department charge nurses and the various aspects of their responsibilities. The findings highlight the importance of patient flow coordination, staff assignment management, collaboration with healthcare professionals, ensuring quality care delivery, and leadership skills development in the role of charge nurses. These insights can guide the development of targeted interventions and training programs aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of charge nurses, ultimately leading to improved patient outcomes and the overall quality of care provided within emergency departments.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the significant role and training needs of emergency department charge nurses. The multifaceted nature of their role, encompassing responsibilities such as coordinating patient flow, managing staff assignments, collaborating with healthcare professionals,

and ensuring quality care delivery, highlights the complexity and importance of their contributions within the emergency department. To optimize patient care and workflow, it is crucial for healthcare organizations to prioritize effective patient flow coordination, ensuring efficient movement of patients through different stages of care. Additionally, the effective management of staff assignments, considering patient acuity, staff competencies, and workload distribution, plays a pivotal role in resource utilization and patient care optimization. Collaboration with healthcare professionals, supported by effective communication and teamwork, is essential for comprehensive and coordinated care delivery. Ensuring quality care delivery through evidence-based practices, adherence to clinical guidelines, patient safety initiatives, and proper documentation promotes the overall safety and satisfaction of patients. Lastly, the continuous development of leadership skills, including effective communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and strategic planning, is vital for charge nurses to successfully manage their roles, create a positive work environment, and promote high-quality patient care. By recognizing and addressing these key themes, healthcare organizations can provide targeted training and support to enhance the skills and competencies of charge nurses, ultimately improving patient outcomes and the overall quality of care within the emergency department.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, several recommendations can be made to address the role and training needs of emergency department charge nurses. Firstly, healthcare organizations should prioritize the development of effective patient flow coordination strategies. This can be achieved through the implementation of standardized protocols, efficient triage systems, and collaborative communication channels to ensure seamless transitions and continuity of care. Secondly, staff assignment management should be supported by workload distribution models that consider patient acuity, staff competencies, and workload balance. Clear guidelines and protocols should be established to optimize the allocation of resources and promote efficient workflow within the emergency department. Thirdly, healthcare organizations should foster a culture of collaboration among healthcare professionals, emphasizing the importance of effective communication and teamwork. Training programs should be designed to enhance interprofessional collaboration skills, fostering a supportive work environment that positively impacts patient outcomes. Fourthly, continuous efforts should be made to ensure quality care delivery. This includes the implementation of evidence-based practices, adherence to clinical guidelines, and regular monitoring of patient safety indicators. Training programs should focus on promoting a culture of patient safety, proper documentation practices, and compliance with regulatory standards. Lastly, leadership skills development should be a priority for charge nurses. Training programs should encompass areas such as effective communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and strategic planning. By strengthening these leadership competencies, charge nurses will be better equipped to manage the complexities of their role and create a positive work environment that promotes high-quality patient care. Overall, healthcare organizations should use the insights gained from this study to develop targeted interventions and training programs that address the multifaceted responsibilities of charge nurses, ultimately improving patient outcomes and enhancing the overall quality of care provided in emergency departments.

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